



ELSAH HISTORY

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Farley's Music Hall



Farley's Music Hall finally restored, warmly welcomes the public. The background shows Dr. Farley's house, now the home of Jim and Joanne Evans

Photo: Edward Bradley

A Short History

In his capacity as Republican boss of Elsah, Dr. Farley undertook in 1885 to construct the long building across the creek from his home. Very quickly it became known as the "Music Hall" or "Farley's Dance Hall." In spite of the protests of the Democrats, the hall became a center of village activity, including visits from wandering Indian medicine shows, meetings of the literary clubs, church socials, school plays, and all sorts of dances.

Elsah: A Historic Guidebook
by Charles B. Hosmer Jr., and Paul O. Williams, 1967
Published by Historic Elsah Foundation, Fifth Edition,
Revised, 1986

The construction of the hall may have been politically motivated, but basically it was built for Dr. Farley's wife, who was a pianist, to give recitals. The hall Dr. Farley built, however, was a one story structure, to which later a second floor and rear space were added. The hall as we know it came to be in 1909, when the Knights of Pythias bought the property and built the additions to it. The second story became their meeting hall. The Knights of Pythias did not keep Farley's very long. In 1918 the Trustees of the Lodge decided to sell it to John B. Reintges. Yet, seven months later one Trustee again sold the hall, this time to the Elsah Methodist Episcopal Church.

The chronology of ownership for the next thirty years became quite confusing, until, in 1950, a final settlement was reached in which Eva Reintges became the sole owner. Four years later Eva Reintges officially sold Farley's to the Trustees of the Elsah Methodist Church, who in turn, in 1964, resold it. The hall changed hands, names, and uses several times before Historic Elsah Foundation finally became its legal owner in December 1993.

Throughout its history the hall served its many different owners in one capacity or another, yet always as a public gathering place for the community.

In practical terms, Farley's Music Hall is listed in the County Court House in Jerseyville in the Office

of the Recorder of Deeds, in book 28, page 640, as a structure on Lot 4 in Block 11 of Elsah. In village reality though, it is a warmly remembered center of past activities, the heart of the community. The following various remembrances by different people attest to it.

A Few Remembrances

There are a few early memories as described in the June 18, 1885 issue of the Jersey County Democrat (courtesy, Jerry Taetz).

"Dr. Farley's music hall will be in demand this summer for parties that will come from a distance. The Dr. has filled a long felt want when he built his music hall."

and,

"We had the pleasure of a call from David Brown and also the pleasure of listening to some very fine music by Mr. Brown, Dr. Farley, Frank Farley, and Mrs. Farley, at the new music hall."

and again,

"We hear a very pleasant party was enjoyed by a few ladies and gentlemen at Dr. Farley's Music hall Monday eve."
(note: Life in Elsah then sounds very much like one of the Jane Austen novels!)

In Elsah no. 2 in the same issue we read about more parties at Farley's Music Hall. The hall did fill the community need of having a central gathering place. In those times, before there were radio and television, communities created their own entertainment, thus:

"A very pleasant party at Dr. Farley's music hall on last Tuesday. Thanks for invitation."

and to top it all off,

"Elsah seems to be the place for pleasure parties at present. We have the river and bluffs, good fishing, and in the evening the best dancing hall in the county at music hall."

In this same article on Elsay we are also informed about the activities of the Knights of Pythias. The article mentions the following:

"The 4th Tuesday of this month the Knights of Pythias will elect officers for the next term. They talk of having an open meeting when they install the newly elected officers."

The Order of Knights of Pythias was founded during the Civil War, in 1864, in Washington, D.C. Its cardinal principles are Friendship, Charity, and Benevolence — the letters in its logo.

EASTER BALL

— GIVEN BY —

KNIGHTS OF PYTHIAS

— AT —

Elsah, Ill., March 28, 1910

TICKETS 75¢

We know very little about their Elsay Lodge, Black Cross No. 106, only that by 1933 the Elsay Lodge was officially listed as defunct.

June Cronin, a long-time Elsay citizen, fondly remembers:

Farley's Music Hall, or the "KP Hall" (Knights of Pythias) as we knew it, played a large part in Elsay's cultural and social life over the years. In the 1930's and 40's it was the site of many school functions — Christmas programs, plays, and musicals. Performances were given on the old stage, complete with heavy curtains. The small room in the back was used as a dressing room for costume changes. These events were enjoyed by the entire community — as well as teachers, children, and their families. Fund raisers, such as bake sales, and bazaars, were also held there.

During the 30's, under a government-sponsored recreation program, Saturday movies were shown. I remember watching the adventures of Clyde Beatty, the animal trainer, Burn-em-up-Barnes, the race car driver, and westerns like Tom Mix. These

were suspense stories that ended when the hero was in some great danger, to be continued with the next week's episode. How exciting!

Eleanor Barnal, who has been an active member of the Elsay Methodist Church for many years, remembers that during the period the church owned the hall it was called the Elsay Methodist Recreation Hall, and many church related activities took place there:

In 1955-56 we organized the Women's Society of Christian Service. We had a Methodist Men's group and a Methodist Youth Fellowship. We all met in the hall. Many community activities, such as the School Halloween parties and the Santa and Community Christmas programs, took place there. Also, the Church held its Bible School classes in the building.

The hall was used for fund raising events, which varied from family style dinners, Strawberry Festivals, Fall Festivals, bake, craft, and rummage sales to pot-luck suppers and apple butter making.



*Double, double, toil and trouble;
fire burn, and cauldron bubble.*

This apple-butter making took two days, and needed lots of workers. We needed strong workers to haul water (there was no water in the building at that time), and to cut wood for the fire. And we needed workers to peel, cook, stir, can, and clean-up. In November of 1961, we made 126 quarts of apple-butter and sold all of it that day! The funds were used to screen the hall windows, and buy tables and chairs, dishes, silverware and stoves for the hall.

In the late 50's the building also hosted a very different type of activity. It was the once a week home of the "Elsah Bluffs Dance School," a ballet school under the artistic direction and inspiration of Mary Loraine Schmidt.

Mary Schmidt was a former ballerina, dancing supporting roles, of the Sadler's Wells Ballet, later the Royal Ballet of London, England. She also was a good friend of Moira Shearer, the dancer of film-fame in the dance movie, *The Red Shoes*.



Aware of this unusual talent living right here in Elsah, we asked Mary to share her art with us. Thus in the fall of 1959, a classical ballet class of several pupils — Nickii Campbell, Sandy Ballard, Anne LeClair, Inge Mack, and some others — blossomed in the old Farley's Music Hall.

Conditions were rather primitive in the sparsely lit hall. There were no exercise bars, nor any mirrors to check one's posture. Before class we would light a fire in the stove, clear any newly spun cobwebs, and sweep the old floor. Actually, any sliding dance movement was basically impossible on the rough floor. For musical accompaniment — we hummed. Yet, a whiff of indefinable sophistication pervaded the room — radiating from Mary. We were transported into a dream world.

Then, in 1984, Jerry and Patti Taetz bought the almost-one-hundred-year-old hall from Jeanette Schuh. They called it "The River Road Drummer" and planned to continue the gifts and antiques sales shop Jeanette used to run. They also intended to restore the structure and bring back cultural events to the hall.

They did organize a variety of well-attended, very nice programs. One recital offered was the female story-teller, Patricia Gullidge, known as "The Prairie Lady."

Patricia enacted the life-story of a young girl of the prairie who became a teacher during the time of Abraham Lincoln's election to the presidency of the United States. She mixed the telling with some singing of old classic songs, while being accompanied on a piano. An old school desk decorated the stage (now removed), while a covered wagon formed the background. Lanterns — no electric lights — were lit all around and on the stage to make it as authentic as possible. It was magic.



The Prairie Lady

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At another time, in 1991, in cooperation with the Methodist Church's "Hanging of the Green's" Patti and Jerry displayed twelve differently decorated Christmas trees in the hall, representing different cultures and times. A "Colonial Tree" was arranged with fruit and magnolia leaves, while another tree hung with blown glass ornaments duplicated an old-fashioned German tree. And sitting amidst all these trees was Chris Limber telling Christmas stories to the wide-eyed Elsah children.

The Great Flood of 1993 brutally put an end to all their plans.

The Salvation and Restoration

During the 1993 flood disaster Farley's Music Hall flooded for about three weeks with six to seven feet of water inside the building. It suffered greatly, and was left on the verge of collapse. On the north side the structure had practically sunk into the ground, and it listed dangerously. According to Bill Carr, the structural engineer of Carr and Associates in St. Louis (who had been asked by HEF to give a professional opinion), the building would be lost within a year unless it were immediately stabilized and straightened. In the eyes of historians and preservationists like Dr. Charles Hosmer, a nationally known authority on the American Preservation Movement and HEF president at the time, Farley's Music Hall, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, constituted a major architectural link in the Elsah "streetscape." To him this was of equal importance to preservation as its historic ties to the villagers.

It was then that HEF, as a public entity, was approached by the Village Board to buy Farley's and be the sponsor of its restoration. This was made possible only by a generous "purchase donation" from an anonymous donor. On September 30, 1993, Gerald T. Taetz and the Historic Elsah Foundation entered into the sales agreement of Farley's Music Hall, "said premises commonly known and referred to as 41 Mill Street, Elsah, Illinois 62028."

Grants received from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in Springfield, Illinois and the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C. and a revolving line of credit from the Jersey State Bank of Jerseyville, Illinois, enabled the Foundation to begin with the implementation of the first two of four phases of a comprehensive restoration and renovation plan. (For later grants and gifts see the financial report.)

The renovation plan was drawn by the well-known St. Louis architect / planner, Jack R. Luer, who has worked extensively on preservation projects with the IHPA in Springfield. Jack, who is "from around here," and as a youth used to come to Elsah by canoe, has always loved the village. He respects the old buildings and what they express. His plan called for a total restoration plus additional interior

features to comply with today's public safety standards and the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act).

Yet, even before any restoration could begin, while HEF was still applying for grants, the IHPA insisted on immediate bracing of the building to keep it intact and in stable condition. It also suggested to later fill the crawl space under the floor with sand and pour a cement sub-floor, and to leave the first floor walls uninsulated — all this in case of an eventual future flood.

In order to preserve the integrity of Farley's the IHPA sent us a Summary of Priorities, beginning with emergency repairs. Shoring, demolition of damaged materials, and straightening were of the first order.

After that was taken care of the actual reconstruction of the structure could begin, such as wall framing, doors, windows, subfloors, and repointing of foundation, etc. Then the utility systems, the plumbing and the electrical, needed to be worked on and be brought up to today's standards of safety and use.

And last, but not least, the finish work had to be done — the painting, the floorcoverings, the placement or replacement of original hardware. We also had to have flood insurance for the building.

The Foundation closely followed these guidelines in its restoration program.

The Restoration Process and Progress

With the emergency shoring in place the straightening could begin, which was accomplished with come-alongs attached to concrete deadmen buried in the ground south of the structure. It took sixty days to straighten the building. It is interesting to note that the lean and consequent distortions had occurred mainly in the original part of the building, the first floor. The rear addition and the added second floor were basically straight, and on the inside they were in pristine bead-boarded condition.

When the brick stove flue on the first floor was pulled apart, a surprise awaited us: there, protected by the flue and thus preserved, were a few alternating red and white colored boards of wainscoting and an intriguing patch of design on the upper half of the wall.

Curious as to what else might be hidden under the existing drab coat of paint on the rest of the wall, Melvin Starkey, the M of S & M Contractors, from Fredericktown, Missouri, our contractor, proceeded to 'clean' other patches of wall, exposing an exciting broad pattern of beautiful muted blues, reddish browns, and whites.

This was so unusual that authorities on decorated community halls, from Chicago and New England, were contacted for advice on what measures to take to properly preserve the decorations. It was decided then and there to concentrate on the cleaning and preservation of the upper wall decorations, and to disregard the evidently earlier red and white wainscot colors.

Further study showed that the original color scheme was a yellow ochre upper wall with the alternating red and white wainscoting boards below. The remarkable designs on the upper wall were superimposed on the original color scheme at the time the second floor was added by the Knights of Pythias. Ultimately, during this restoration, the wainscoting was painted a "supporting" blue hue.

The actual straightening of Farley's Hall was begun immediately upon receiving the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency's grant. The work was done by Jessie Francis, a restorationist with St. Louis County. The process took, as mentioned earlier, sixty days, and was followed with the greatest of interest by all Elsah villagers.

The order of straightening was as follows:

1. Most of the flooring was torn out and cribbing put in the front corners of the hall.
2. Cables to two deadmen placed in the ground on the south side of Farley's were hooked to eyelets through a sandwich beam on the south and north walls. These took up the strain. Then the chimney was taken down.

3. There was no lift, just downward pressure on cribbing — not on walls. Francis slowly pulled a half-inch a day.

4. He then put cribbing in the back corners of the original hall. He was able to pull it 27" out of lean. Later he lost six inches when the cables were released prematurely by others.

5. Using eight foot beams resting on two piers on each side of the building, and moving same westward, the full length of the hall, he lifted the walls, section by section so work on the foundation, sills and walls could be done. He lifted and leveled and transferred the weight of the structure to the cribbing.

6. Lastly he put in cribbing in the middle to raise the center beam and posts. That made it possible to take out the crumbling old footings under the steel posts and pour strong new ones.

The floor boards which had been removed were in poor condition and were discarded (they dated from a 1970's rehab). Existing 1970's floor joists were removed, as well as what was left of the rotted sill timbers. The foundation was tuckpointed on both the outside and the inside. This was followed by filling the former crawl space with a layer of sand and pouring a cement subfloor over that. The new white pine floor boards were laid down later over sleepers attached to the concrete subfloor. No insulation was installed in the first floor walls to prevent rotting in case of another flood.

The boards and battens on the outside walls were repaired and, where necessary, replaced. The old battens used on the building showed three different molding patterns.

A drainpipe was installed on the outside, around the north wall of the hall, with grates to drain into the creek, while a ditch in front of the building will drain rain water away from the structure, also towards the creek.

All window sash and frames on the first floor were replaced with newly built copies. Where necessary, doors and frames were repaired or new ones built. The newly discovered wall decoration and old photos pointed to a single narrow front door.

An old door, closing off the back stairs, was found to be the right width. During repair work on it we found that one of the paint layers was the same reddish-brown as the wall decorations, leading to speculation that it might have been the front door at one time. The door is older than the original part of the hall and quite probably was taken from Farley's home during its renovation into a mansard style house.

This door was installed in place of the pair of old gunstock doors put in during the 1970s. These were later reused in the only major interior change, the inside cross-wall. The cross-wall was added to strengthen the building and to create an entry foyer for the hall itself.

The plumbing system was improved, and a better ADA accessible restroom was installed in the back addition. The space next to it was transformed into a pleasant kitchen.

The William Davidson Painting Company from St. Louis took care of all the interior and exterior paint finishes. In the spring of 1995, after the building had been straightened, the Davidson workers cleaned the metal roof by thoroughly sanding it, and then brooming it to get rid of rust residue. Next a coat of special primer was applied, and after this a final coat of Red II paint.

William Davidson, working together with Melvin Starkey, produced a perfect color blend to match the newly exposed wall decoration on the main floor. The clean and touched-up (in spots) walls were then finished with a linseed oil wipe. The woodwork in the upstairs space was in such good condition that all it needed was a thorough cleaning and varnishing.

The electric service was replaced and upgraded and modern museum grade, track-light systems were installed on both levels. The front entrance boasts a reissue of an early Dietz street lamp of the type used for many years in Elsah from 1880 on. And lastly, a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning unit (a HVAC) will be installed, which will make the hall usable year around. The Village Board recently voted to give Historic Elsah Foundation \$5,485 for the express purpose of purchasing and installing the HVAC system. These funds

represent the proceeds from an Elsah Flood Restoration Benefit Concert given by the Philip Smith family in Chicago in 1993 (see *Elsah History* nos. 64 and 65) and donated to the Village. Here again is an example of the deep-felt community spirit that radiates and inspires.

This happy spirit touches everyone, as can be seen in the following recollections of the important restoration activities that took place in and around the hall, and the invitation to come and see for yourself, by Sandra Ivison, who is the S of S & M Contractors:

"Has everyone in Elsah seen Farley's Music Hall lately? If you haven't, you might want to stop by and take a look. It has recently been restored by S&M Contractors of Frederickton, Missouri. One of the things that is noticeable is the siding on the exterior. It was restored and painted in the original colors. The roof was repaired and painted also. At the front entrance to the building there is a new landing. S&M Contractors also installed new electric service and a pole light at the corner of the building.

In the interior, the second floor was also restored. It was repaired, cleaned, painted, varnished, and the windows were trimmed. A new flue was built to replace the original missing one. While restoring the first floor, they had to strip the walls of paint and remove a flue that wasn't originally there. As he was removing the flue, Melvin Starkey uncovered some original paintings. To preserve this for everyone to see, the walls were carefully stripped of paint down to the original paintings.

S & M Contractors further installed a new handicap restroom, restored the original entrance door, and repaired a pair of gunstock doors and placed these in the vestibule wall. There is new tile flooring in the kitchen area and restroom. Also, take a look at the floor in the main area. It was restored with random length, random width pine, sanded and finished.

The interior was painted and decorated to match the original decor and new track lighting was installed."

Grants and Gifts

As the treasurer's financial report shows, large sums of money were needed to restore Farley's Music Hall. Most money came from grants, though there also were some substantial gifts.

The acceptance of any public grant carries with it responsibilities of some kind. Usually there are time limits. In the case of the flood-relief grant from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency to the Historic Elsah Foundation, a Preservation Covenant was signed. The Foundation agreed to assume full responsibility for the proper restoration and preservation of Farley's. HEF also agreed, for a period of five (5) years, to pay the cost of the continued maintenance and repair of this property, and to guarantee public access.

The Historic Elsah Foundation, which was incorporated in 1971, is a 'not-for-profit' corporation. Its purposes are basically the preservation of the architecture and culture of the Village of Elsah, Illinois. It is organized and operated exclusively for charitable purposes. All earned funds, from memberships, publication sales, rents, etc., are funneled back into the village in the form of restoration and preservation, research and education.

All members of the Board are volunteers. The only paid member is the Secretary-Treasurer, who receives a mere two hundred dollars a month. No one else receives any remuneration in any form, ever.

Financial Report

October 1993 through July 1996

We received from

An anonymous donor, to purchase Farley's Music Hall	\$ 30,000.00
The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency	57,942.00
The Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs	40,000.00
The National Trust	5,000.00
Bequest from Edwin M. Neylon	5,000.00
Contributions received for musicale in May 1996	300.00
Miscellaneous contributions	<u>377.00</u>
Total Contributions	\$138,619.00

...and we spent

Purchase, closing costs, bracing	\$ 31,235.53
Architect and engineering	6,630.69
Renovation costs	131,328.92
Real Estate Taxes	1,119.92
Flood Insurance	974.00
Insurance (fire/wind)	870.80
Interest on loan	2,405.87
Utilities	<u>1,166.44</u>
	\$175,732.17

...additional funds used

Jersey State Bank (outstanding bank loan)	21,334.96
Historic Elsah Foundation funds	<u>15,778.21</u>

Total amount spent October 1993 through July 1996 **\$175,732.17**

Estimated expense to complete the renovation project:

Heating and air conditioning system	\$8,500.00
Contribution received for this expense	<u>5,485.00</u>
Additional amount needed	\$3,015.00

Contractors

Historic Elsay Foundation hired Robert F. Allen, of Jerseyville, dba Great River Woodworking and Restoration Company, as the general restoration contractor for the work on Farley's. He had been highly recommended to us.

On April 22, 1994, we signed a contract for the execution of the first phases, in which Allen agreed to meet the rules and deadlines established by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. Unfortunately, in spite of several proddings, admonitions, and extensions of time, Allen did not comply with the agreed upon terms.

At the recommendation of the project architect, Jack Luer, the contract was terminated in March, 1995.

The Foundation was very fortunate when Jack found Melvin Starkey, a well-known and respected restoration contractor of Fredericktown, Missouri, who with great enthusiasm and restoration knowledge agreed to finish the Farley Project. By the way, again, Melvin is the 'M' of S&M Contractors, while the 'S' stands for his daughter, Sandra, who takes care of all the administrative work in the company.

Conclusion

The restoration project is completed. There only rests the final renovation part, the purchase and installation of the HVAC unit. This will be done in the coming month. The building has its straight and simple presence again in the Elsay 'streetscapes.' It stands now in its old and new full glory.

The Historic Elsay Foundation Board members are grateful to all and everyone who participated in any way in the preservation process. They also sincerely hope that Farley's Music Hall again will become a much loved center of community activities, and that it will encompass, as of old, an ever larger circle of the interested public.

VILLAGE HAPPENINGS

by Paula Bradley with photographs by Ned Bradley

Farley's Music Hall Historic Benefit Concert

On May 5 Historic Elsay Foundation inaugurated the beautifully restored Farley's Music Hall with a benefit concert. Cookies were on sale and coffee and punch were free. Admission was \$5.00.



The festive hall

Three singers donated their services and talents, enabling us to raise \$300 toward our mortgage. A duo, Zoë Daggett and Cory Merrill, both students at Principia College, have been performing their own original songs with great success at various clubs and other spots in St. Louis this past year. In June they were featured on a St. Louis radio show. The third singer, Randy Williams, also a college student, performed songs from a number of sources, including ones by Jacques Brel in French. The singers accompanied themselves on guitar.

Besides their music, the three worked long and hard helping to sweep the hall, move in chairs and tables, arrange lighting, sell tickets, and handle publicity. Brian Case, their manager and friend was the indefatigable technical director and unflappable jack-of-all-trades. Without Brian we could never have pulled it all together. He even baked cookies with his mom, Robiny Case, past midnight just before the event. Several other HEF members also gave generously of their time and efforts to bake cookies: June Cronin, Eleanor Barnal, Jeri Lewitz, Marie Cresswell, and Jane Pfeifer. Jerry Taetz, the former owner of Farley's, gave out copies of an 1885 newspaper article about the Hall, and spoke interestingly during the intermission about the history of the building and its restoration.



Zoë Daggett and Cory Merrill

This event was received enthusiastically by all who attended. It's the sort of thing many villagers feel we need more of. Farley's is ideal for such performances and other gatherings.

Historic Elsay Foundation thanks all who so freely and lovingly donated their time and efforts to make the first Farley benefit event a success. We especially thank Paula Bradley, who had the idea of this concert, and, with the warm support of an admirable crew, followed through. She inspired everyone, and organized a truly wonderful Elsay community occasion. *(the Editor)*



Randy Williams performing



Jerry Taetz, the former owner of Farley's sharing information about its history during intermission.



The refreshment corner: Paula Bradley and Eleanor Barnal serving Betty McIntire and Edith Hammond

The Elsie Museum's long-time staffer, Susan Van Meter, announced recently that she could no longer serve in that job. She and her daughter are moving to Kansas City. HEF has been fortunate to have had her capable and dependable services. We're certainly going to miss her. Members of HEF's Board presented Susan with a bouquet and gave her a grateful send-off with sparkling grape juice and chocolates under a shiny "Thank You" balloon. Most fortunately a replacement for her has been found, Mrs. Esther Bally. The HEF Board looks forward to working with her.

HEF Board member Daniel Zimmerman recently resigned. We are very grateful for his many years of dedicated service and we will miss him.

Jim and Joanne Evans are happy to see their exterior restoration completed at last. The painters have gone and the lovely house is looking much as it did originally. The front porch has been restored; the beautiful stone foundation is once more visible; a back porch, a copy of the one in a rare old photo of the house, is now built. The building is richly painted very dark green with pale cream trim. Details of moldings and corn ornaments, before nearly invisible, now stand out, thanks to the contrasting colors. Congratulations on a job well done in the face of incredible difficulties.

The end of May brought terrible weather and another, though minor, flood. Elsie and other parts of Jersey and Calhoun counties experienced an amazing hail storm. It shredded new leaves on trees and other new plants, leaving green "confetti" piled inches deep. It caused one of Askew Creek's infamous gully washers, piling up sections of tree trunks and branches at the fording between the churches. Earth moving equipment and clean-up crews worked for hours to reopen the street to traffic. Mud clogged gutters and washed over sidewalks in places.

The flooded Mississippi reached the basements of Riverview and the Corner Nest but nothing of value was damaged. Hard work was all it cost the Doerrs and the Lists, moving out and back stored items, and cleaning up.

Historic Elsie Foundation

Officers

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